



An ACCOUNT

Of the Conduct of the *Council* which dismissed the Rev. Mr. *Edwards* from the *Pastoral Care* of the first Church at *Northampton*; with Reflections on the *Protestation* accompanying the *Printed Result* of that Council, and the *Letter Published* relating to that Affair.

In a Letter to a Friend.



IN Compliance with your Desire, " of a more particular Account of the Conduct of the Council that dismissed the Rev. Mr. *Edwards* from his Charge of the first Church of *Northampton*, than you have been able yet to obtain from the sight of the *Result* of that Council, and the *Protestation* accompanying that Result, and the *Letter* published by a Gentleman in *Boston* from his Friend in the Country," we will in a few Words give you an impartial and just Relation of that Affair, though a Regard to those protesting Gentlemen would have forbid us, had not the Publication of that Protestation &c. — rendered it necessary.

We conclude, we need not inform you that the Church of *Northampton* have for many Years been fully established in those Principles mentioned as theirs in the *Result*, and that Mr. *Edwards*, when he settled there, and for many Years after, acted agreeable thereto, though of late Years he has embraced the Principles mentioned in his Treatise upon

upon the *Qualifications for full Communion in the Church*,— and could no longer proceed in his former Method of Admission to *Baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*: — And accordingly *refused* some Persons who offered themselves to Admission, and whom the Church thought qualified for Communion. — This occasioned great Uneasiness among them; and after a considerable Tract of Time, the Controversy being as the Church thought sufficiently agitated, Mr. *Edwards* having used his Endeavours to lead his People to Embrace what he apprehended was Truth — and they having examined the Scriptures and other Treatises upon the Subject, and still retaining their former Sentiments, the *Ecclesiastical Council* before-mentioned was mutually chosen by Mr. *Edwards* and his Church; and accordingly Letters were sent to the several Churches chosen, desiring their Presence by their Rev. Elders and Delegates, “ to give their best Advice for a Remedy from
 “ the present unsettled broken State of the Church by Reason
 “ of this Controversy; and if they upon the whole of what
 “ they found in their Circumstances judged it requisite, to
 “ proceed immediately to dissolve the Relation between Pastor
 “ and People, as expressed in their Letters Missive—

The Council, being convened at *Northampton*, had the Matter in Controversy laid before them, when it appeared the Pastor and the Church stedfastly adhered to their Principles in Opposition to each other, but desired the Council to find out some Method wherein the Pastor and Brethren might consistently unite in the Admission of Persons to special Ordinances, and yet retain their different Sentiments, if such an one could be found: — When the Rev. Mr. *Edwards* let the Council know he could not with a good Conscience be active in admitting Persons to Sacraments, or in administering Sacraments to them, who are without those visible Qualifications, mentioned in his Treatise upon Qualifications for full Communion, and delivered his Reasons therefor in Writing; and the Church also, let the Council know, that they could not in Conscience bar all such as were without those Qualifications, Mr. *Edwards* insisted on.

on. Hereupon the *Council* retired and consulted about some Method wherein the Rev. Mr. *Edwards* and his Church might unite, consistent with their different Sentiments, in the Admission of Persons to Gospel Ordinances, and after a large Debate upon one Method and another, the *Council* at last came to the following Resolve, " That
 " after maturely weighing and deliberating the Case in
 " all its Circumstances, we have as yet been able to find
 " no proper Expedient to reconcile Pastor and People,
 " and therefore are ready to proceed to an hearing upon
 " the other Point; viz. a Separation of Mr. *Edwards*
 " from his People." This passed, *Nemine Contradicente*.

And now the Council repaired to the Meeting-House and published the fore-mentioned Resolve, and proceeded to hear the Church Committee upon the Reasonableness and Necessity of a Separation. After this the Moderator asked Mr. *Edwards* if he had any thing to offer in Reply to the Committee, and he answered, *he had no Disposition to enter into that Controversy, though he had no Inclination to leave his People if he could continue peaceably with them*; then Col. *Dwight* and others who adhered to Mr. *Edwards*, were asked, whether they had any Thing to offer, and they were silent—The hearing of the Case being now finished, the Council retired and considered of the Reasons offered by the Church Committee for a Dismission of the Rev. Mr. *Edwards*; and after fully discussing the Matter, the following Questions were put, viz.

1. Whether it be the Opinion of this Council that the Rev. Mr. *Edwards*, persisting in his Principles, and the Church in theirs in Opposition to Mr. *Edwards*, and insisting on a Separation, it is necessary that the Relation between Pastor and People be dissolved? Passed in the Affirmative.

We would only observe here, that all the Members of the Council said yes, to the Question, except the Rev. Messrs. *Billing* and *Abercrombie*, and Mr. *Gray*, who said they had nothing to say to the Question, and the Rev. Mr. *Raynolds* and his Delegate who said yes, if no Remedy can be found; which as yet they could not conceive of—

2. Whether

2. Whether it be expedient that this Relation be immediately dissolved ?

Resolved in the Affirmative by the Majority of one Voice only.

Then a *Result* was drawn up, and publickly read, and after that the Protestation was publickly read also : and the Church voted their Consent to the *Result* and Advice of the *Council* — and the Rev. Mr. *Edwards* was dismissed by a great Majority ; the Number that appeared against his Dismission being but twenty, though it was said by them there were three or four more against his Dismission, that were not present ; whereas the Number of Male Members as certified by Mr. *Edwards*, was *two hundred twenty nine* —

Having given this Relation of Facts, we cannot but make a few Remarks on the Conduct of those Gentlemen that *protested* against the Dismission —

You doubtless observe, that they say they cannot agree to a Dismission, at least for the present.

1. “ Because that in the Nature of the Thing there is no just Cause therefor : Mr. *Edwards*, his Sentiments being perfectly harmonious with the Mind of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, &c.”

And what if they did apprehend so, and what if they really were so? Are the Church and Congregation of *Northampton* obliged therefore to receive those Principles, and act agreeable to them, though they in their Consciences are really persuaded that they are contrary to the Mind of our LORD JESUS CHRIST? — Have they not a Right of private Judgment? and are they not bound to act agreeable thereto as well as others? And if they judge Mr. *Edwards* alters the Conditions on which CHRIST the great Author of the Gospel Charter has granted them the Liberty and Privilege of attending the Ordinances he has instituted for the conveying the Graces of the Spirit to their Souls, to fit them for the Enjoyment of him in Glory, yea, has made it their Duty to attend for this Purpose, have they not an indisputable Right to oppose Mr. *Edwards*, and seek

seek his Dismissal from them ? We think this is what all must grant upon *Protestant Principles* ; and if so, how could the Gentlemen refuse to vote his Dismissal ? and of what Force and Efficacy is this Reason, and is not the refusing to grant such a Separation, a downright Invasion of the Rights of others Consciences ? But whether Mr. *Edwards* his Sentiments are perfectly harmonious, &c. we shall not at present dispute ; However, That the Reason here assigned by the Gentlemen who could not agree to a Separation, was not perfectly *harmonious* with what they both voted and said in Council, we think none will Dispute. The Gentlemen will not pretend to deny, that they voted a Separation to be necessary, Mr. *Edwards* continuing of his Principles, and the Church of theirs ; and how could they then consistently say, they could not agree to a Separation at present because Mr. *Edwards* his Sentiments were perfectly harmonious, &c : if this was a Reason against a Separation for the *present*, it would have been equally forcible in Time to come.

But they say, 2dly, “ Upon Supposition that Mr. *Edwards* were in the wrong in the present Controversy ; yet there is, as we apprehend, no Proportion, between the Importance of the Controversy, and that of his Dismissal ” — But how could the Gentlemen assign this as a Reason, and say, the Importance of the Controversy bears no Proportion to the Importance of his Dismissal, when they themselves could find no Method wherein Pastor and People, differing so widely in Sentiments, could unite in the Admission of Persons to special Ordinances, and (some of them) judged a Separation necessary : When it is evident the Controversy was of such Importance, that the Doors of the Church had been shut for some Years past, and must have continued so, unless one or other of the Parties had altered their Sentiments, or sacrificed their Consciences ?

And as to the third Reason assigned by the Gentlemen why they could not agree to a Separation of Mr. *Edwards* from his People, viz. “ it appeared to them there had
“ been

“ been no proper Essays in the Way of fair Reasoning
 “ with or before the Parties, to convince either of them of
 “ the Truth or Falseness of their Principles, which Love
 “ to the Truth and their Souls requires”—How could
 these Gentlemen say that no proper Essays had been made,
 when nothing is more obvious, than that the Rev. Mr.
Edwards had calmy reasoned with his People, both from
 the Pulpit and the Press, as well as in Conversation with
 many of them? Can these Gentlemen have the Vanity
 to imagine, that they could in a short Time convince that
 People by Reasoning with them, when Mr. *Edwards* by
 all his Preaching, Printing and Reasoning with them
 could not convince them, although under the Advantage
 of his People’s having an high Opinion of, and endeared
 Affection to him—which those Gentlemen could not pre-
 tend to—And when the neighbouring Ministers had spent
 considerable Time in endeavouring to convince Mr. *Ed-*
wards; and Mr. *Billings* one of the Protestors, had with
 special Zeal attempted to reclaim him from what he ap-
 prehended at that Time was an Error in Mr. *Edwards*?

As to the last Reason the Gentlemen assign, viz. “ the
 “ Church, or at least its Committee, whilst they offer to
 “ us Reasons for seperating them from their Pastor, yet
 “ will not suffer us so to enter into the Grounds of the
 “ Reasons as to offer them that Light which the Word
 “ of God affords, which we esteem an Imposition on
 “ our Consciences, and doth but tend to keep them in
 “ the Dark ;—

It is certain that neither Mr. *Edwards*, nor the Church
 of *Northampton*, determined to refer the Point in Contro-
 versy to the Decision of the Council: but how these
 Gentlemen can judge this to be an Imposition on their
 Consciences we cannot conceive. Had not Mr. *Edwards*
 and the Church of *Northampton* a Right to determine
 whether they would refer that Matter to them or not?
 or was it necessary that the Council should settle the Point
 in Controversy between Mr. *Edwards* and the Church;
 in order to their determining whether there could be an
 Accommodation,

Accommodation, or that a Separation was necessary? As to the first, we cannot suppose the Gentlemen themselves will pretend it to be necessary, nor even the latter, when they consider that they themselves voted that Mr. *Edwards* persisting in his Principles, and the Church in theirs, a Separation was necessary.

But what renders the Protestation more surprising is, that when these Things lay with so much Weight on their Minds, they should never so much as mention them when Matters were debated in Council before they had come to a *Result*; which we suppose we might reasonably have expected from them, but cannot remember they ever did. Indeed we well remember that some of them with a pretty deal of Pathos urged, that Mr. *Edwards* his Dismission might not immediately take Place, but be deferred for some Months, that his Salary might be continued, till he had Time to turn himself, and make Provision for his Family; but of this we find no mention made in the Protestation, and therefore conclude, it afterwards lost its Weight with them.—Another Thing also diverse Times urged as a Motive to defer the Dismission for a few Months was, that if done, there might be an Union among the Members of the *Council*—And it was offered by some of those Gentlemen, that the *Council* should immediately vote a Separation, and that nothing should be deferred but only leading the Church to the Vote and the Formality of declaring the Relation between Mr. *Edwards* and his Church Dissolved.

But although we were very desirous of acting unitedly, and although we had the Interest of Mr. *Edwards* and his Family very near our Hearts, yet when they were in Competition with the Peace of *Northampton* Church and the Interest of Religion there, we were at no Loss, which ought to have the Preference. And therefore we thought it our Duty to give our Voices for Mr. *Edwards* his Dismission.—

Thus

Thus Sir, we have given you some brief Account of the Conduct of the *Ecclesiastical Council at Northampton*, and have added some Remarks upon the *Protestation* offered by some of the Members against Mr. *Edwards* his Dismission, we hope without any just Grounds of Offence to any. And are,

Your humble Servants,

Robert Breck

Joseph Ashley

Timothy Woodbridge

Chester William

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